

Building Peace and Democracy in Africa: Why Open Access to Knowledge is Vital



Richard Joseph

Delivered on October 24, 2017 for Arch Library, Northwestern University

In conjunction with *Open Access Week*, an international event promoting the practice of making scholarship publicly available online, the Arch Library of Northwestern University hosted Dr. Richard Joseph, Professor of Political Science and African Studies at Northwestern University, at an October 2017 event entitled **Building Peace and Democracy in Africa: Why Open Access to Knowledge is Vital**¹. Professor Joseph spoke on his work studying politics in Africa and why access to information is crucial to democratic governance. Chris Diaz, director of Arch Library, remarked in his introduction:

The way in which scholarship is distributed is often restricted by economic and legal realities. It is estimated that scholarly publishing is a \$25 billion dollar per year business where the copyright for much of the content is licensed by a handful of publishers.

*About 15 years ago, this problem of information access motivated scholars to define **open access** as an alternative model for sharing research, where the copyright is retained by the author and the scholarship is freely distributed on the public internet. Scholars make their research open access in two ways: they publish in open access journals or books, or they deposit a version of their research in an open access repository. Last spring, [Arch Library](#) was created at Northwestern University as an open access repository.*

*Around the time that we got up and running, I met Professor Richard Joseph. Recently, Professor Joseph, his research team, and I worked to collect and archive on Arch Library several of his published and unpublished writings in a volume called *The Nigerian Crucible*. These include articles, research papers, book chapters, and other scholarly documents that are available to anyone in the world, most especially to people in Africa.*

*Working with Professor Joseph on *The Nigerian Crucible* has been one of the most exciting projects I've worked on because providing free access to scholarship for people in other parts of the world is exactly what we hoped to do when we launched Arch.*

¹ Video of the event can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hjzm0MaKQ8>

Here are Professor Joseph's remarks at this event.

"It is so pitiable" Prof. Ikenna Onyido
University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria, November 2007

"It felt like the end of an era," Professor Amy Poteete
During the funeral of former Botswana president, Ketumile (Quett) Masire, June 2017

"Africa has a long way to go," Professor Scott Taylor
After democracy-monitoring visits to Kenya and Zambia, August 2017

"Remember our Past," Ansahta Garnett, woman activist
Prior to the October 2017 Liberian elections²

I ***Introduction***

I first learned of digital scholarship as a member of the Board of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), 1991-1997. Two decades later, I am aware of how much digital learning complements and extends conventional modes of scholarly communication. The topics to which I have devoted the greatest attention - state systems, democracy, security, governance, and development - are more complicated than ever. My close colleague, Stanford Professor Larry Diamond, wrote in 2014: "a zone of democracy is also a zone of peace and security."³ Such zones, however, are retreating further and further from us.

² Poteete and Taylor, Professors of Political Science, Concordia University, Canada, and Georgetown University, respectively, served on the *Africa Demos* team of the Carter Center's African Governance Program in the early 1990s. Helene Cooper, "Yielding Power, Women Lecture Men of Liberia," *New York Times*, October 10, 2017; Ian Johnson, "Xi Jinping and China's New Era of Glory," *New York Times*, October 15, 2017.

³ "Promoting Democracy in postconflict and failed states," In *Search of Democracy* (London and New York: 2016), p. 424.

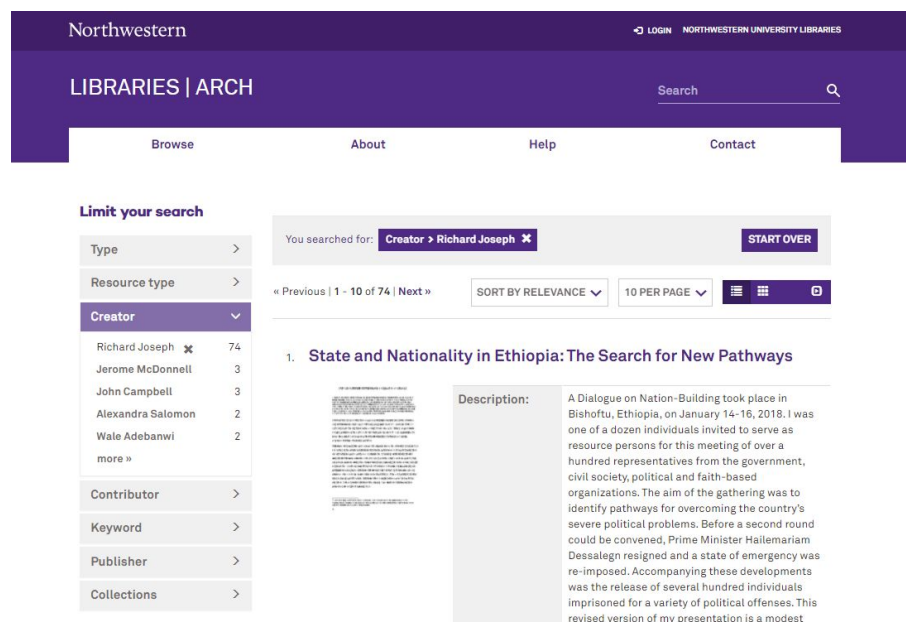
Wider participation in the construction, recuperation, and dissemination of knowledge is essential to overcoming the social and political chasms in America and the world. Access to knowledge in Africa is often narrow, despite the arrival of the Internet and the creation of hundreds of colleges and universities. Instruction is usually of poor quality. Unsatisfactory conditions often oblige the best scholars to migrate abroad, and libraries are usually deficient. Most academic books, even by African authors, have small print runs and are often unaffordable locally. The great majority of international journals are not accessible.

The construction of knowledge about Africa should both fully engage and be accessible to Africans and others. Knowledge of what has actually occurred in the pursuit of peace and democracy is vital, and ever more so today. Here is a helpful definition of “vital” taken from the Web: *“necessary to the existence, continuance, or well-being of something; indispensable; essential: vital for a healthy society.”* Open Access to knowledge in our society becomes more vital as “truth” has been relativized and even denied. Our societies are rendered “unhealthy” by the deliberate perversion of knowledge and dismissal of “facts.” How important it is to then provide access to undeniably factual documents, composed and shared as major peace and democracy exercises in Africa were underway.

Arch Library

I was told about Arch Library in spring 2017, following a meeting convened by Esmeralda Kale, Curator of the Herskovits Library. A subsequent meeting with Chris Diaz of Arch showed how this new entity could facilitate the active sharing

of information and analyses with scholars, students, and the general public. As the director of the African Governance Program of the Carter Center in Atlanta, 1988-1994, I saw the need to make information and analyses of peace and democratic processes more widely available. A small group of students and faculty produced and published the bulletin, *Africa Demos*, under my supervision. All the issues have been scanned by Northwestern Library and are accessible on *Arch*. The same is true of the online blog, *AfricaPlus*, started at Northwestern in 2012 and, like *Africa Demos*, produced and managed largely by undergraduate student-researchers.



Screen-grab from the search page of Arch Library, Northwestern University Libraries' new open access repository (March 25, 2017)

In 2017, this work underwent a quantum leap, thanks to support from Northwestern's Office of Undergraduate Research, the Farrell Fellowship program of the Political Science Department, the Undergraduate Research Program of Weinberg College, a grant from the MacArthur Foundation and the Institute of

International Education, Arch Library, and the superb facilities provided by Northwestern's Transportation Center.

A forum series on "[Democracy and Insecurity in Africa](#)" in Evanston and Chicago in spring 2017 was followed by a pilot project based on my extensive archives on Carter Center peace and democracy initiatives. As a Fellow of the Carter Center, 1988-1994, I was involved, alongside other Carter Center officers and partner institutions, in several of these initiatives. For a quarter-century, I have preserved thousands of internal documents and published materials. These archives, together with the extraordinary holdings of Northwestern's Herskovits Library, provide unique opportunities for immersive learning.

II

Immersive Learning

The term "immersive learning" was suggested by one of the student-researchers in the pilot project, Michael Ryzhov. Another, Alexander Smith, called these archives "Windows to the Past." He highlighted the opportunity they provide to experience "the complex tapestry" of these transitional moments. Similar language has been used to describe a current exhibit at the Smart Museum, University of Chicago: "Revolution Every Day," on post-revolutionary graphic art, video, and film in the Soviet Union, mainly on and by women. The program notes: "It immerses visitors in the distinct textures and speeds of everyday life." The opportunity to do so for peace and democracy initiatives in Africa, drawing on similar materials in my possession, and complemented by the Herskovits Collection, the Brock Museum,

and Northwestern's expanding capacities in digital learning, is - to put it simply - extraordinary.

A pertinent display in the Museum on Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile, is described as “an immersive experience of Washington’s intervention in Chile and its 17-year relationship with the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.”⁴ The words of the Museum’s director, Francisco Estévez, resonate: “This exhibit is a victory in the fight against negationism, the efforts to deny and relativize what happened during our dictatorship.” I am intrigued by the immersive learning experiences that can be created regarding peace, governance, democracy, and development in Africa. My archives extend over the half-century of my involvement in African studies and further back to the U.S. civil rights movement (and especially the summer of 1967 spent in Sunflower County, Mississippi, working with Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party).

Here are some highlights:

1. The first two parts of a five-part volume of my articles, book chapters, lectures, and commentaries entitled *The Nigerian Crucible* have been published on Arch Library. Over fifty edited documents will be available to anyone, anywhere, and anytime with access to the Internet.⁵ The first entry in Part I is a paper presented at a high-level conference in March 1977 on the draft constitution for Nigeria’s Second Republic, written just a year after I

⁴ *The New York Times*, October 15, 2017.

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https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/collections/rb68xb902?utf8=%E2%9C%93&sort=system_create_dtsi+asc&per_page=20

first arrived to teach at the University of Ibadan. The last entry in Part II is a June 1999 public lecture in Lagos, delivered a month after the start of the Fourth Republic and after 15 years of successive military governments.

2. Six research assistants were given access in summer 2017 to my personal archives on peace and democracy initiatives of the Carter Center from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. The students became so knowledgeable about their focus countries that interviews on Skype were arranged with leading experts. The pilot project was taken to another level with discussions, first via Skype, and then in person, with senior Carter Center officials on September 12, 2017. The summit of these immersive experiences was a meeting of three of the researchers with President Carter that afternoon. Mr. Carter spoke candidly about the peace and democracy operations that the students had closely studied.



Michael Ryzhov, Sam Forsgren, President Jimmy Carter, Alexander Smith, and Professor Joseph during the research team's visit to The Carter Center in September 2017

III

Student Reports

Here are comments from the student-researchers in this pilot project:

Ethiopia and Eritrea

Arch Library enables individuals to have access to resources needed to understand the political histories of their countries that are usually available to elites and academics. The archival documents showed the difficulty of arranging peace talks between warring parties in Ethiopia in 1989-90. These talks marked a key moment in the political development of Ethiopia and Eritrea and foreshadow the inability to move past authoritarian governance.⁶

Liberia

I had the unique opportunity to access internal Carter Center documents. These files provide incomparable insights into the conflicts in Liberia in the early 1990s. The sessions went a step further in the teleconferences with Carter Center officials. I was one of three researchers who, along with Prof. Joseph, met with Pres. Carter on September 12. I asked him directly about his negotiations with the notorious warlord, and eventual president, Charles Taylor. This exchange with a former U.S. president will stay with me for the rest of my life. During the summer, I developed my own set of themes, ranging from the pattern of complicating violence to the triumph of multilateral peacekeeping efforts. This project provided a lens for observing the rise of democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Ghana

I participated in conversations with experts on Ghanaian politics, discussed cross-cutting questions with the other researchers in the group, and conducted oral interviews with Prof. Joseph. The process of immersive learning culminated in the Carter Center trip. I studied the reasons for Ghana's successful democratic consolidation. As much as I learned about this country, the most important lessons came from the process of immersive learning via the wealth of primary materials in Prof. Joseph's archives.

We now have an understanding of the contents of the archive, which will make future research on this topic easier. My final report, along with those of the other researchers, can provide a base for more detailed studies of the period and Carter Center interventions. If just a fraction of the archival documents can be made available through online platforms, our understanding of this period and these interventions can greatly improve.

⁶ In January 15-17, 2018, I was a member of a resource committee for a Dialogue involving over a hundred representatives of the government, and of political, civic, and faith groups in Bishoftu, Ethiopia. A reference for this event were the February 1994 consultations convened at The Carter Center to foster a more inclusive framework for governing Ethiopia after armed warfare. The formal Dialogue as a result of tumultuous developments in February-March 2018 that involved the release of many political prisoners, replacement of the Prime Minister, street protests and the re-imposition of the state of emergency.

Zambia

I studied the long history of promoting political action, self-governance, and peace in what was once seen as a promising African country. However, economic stagnation and government mismanagement have frustrated these hopes. Throughout my experiences this summer, I learned important skills. The most important was the ability to delve into a large amount of primary documents and synthesize important findings. I was also able to interact and interview several experts over Skype. This helped me learn about gathering information in a qualitative way. It was important to prepare and know what questions to ask during the exchanges with country experts.

IV

Open Access in the “Post-Truth Era”

As contended by Larry Diamond, peacebuilding and democracy promotion were once viewed as twin processes, especially as the Cold War drew to a close. That nexus has since been overridden by national security concerns and the global resurgence of autocracy. Liberal democracy was long linked to the capacity to hold governments accountable in a variety of ways, and especially via free and fair elections. Elections, however, are being undermined by fraudulent techniques including cyber interference and the deliberate posting of fake news.⁷ Voting as a path to the peaceful resolution of conflicts is today often thwarted. Iraqi Kurds went to the ballot box on September 27 to express their aspirations for independence. National, regional, and global responses, however, have left them more insecure. The same is true of Catalonia following the referendum on October 1st.⁸ Many examples can be given of voting exercises that precede the closing rather than opening of political space.

⁷ That President Barack Obama, who powerfully championed human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance, should have declared in person that the May 2015 elections in Ethiopia - which resulted in the ruling party coalition winning 100% of parliamentary seats - were “democratic” demonstrates just how frail such judgments have become.

⁸ Since this talk was delivered, both sets of aspirations have been severely curtailed by the superior force of Iraqi and Spanish central governments.



Pro-unity demonstrators in Barcelona with the Spanish and Catalan Senyera flag. "38 percent is not Catalonia" refers to voter turnout in the disrupted referendum. October 29, 2017 (Photo courtesy of AFP)

An upsurge in violent conflict and political repression in the Middle East has followed the “Arab Spring.” Greater autocracy and state violence can be seen in Egypt and Turkey, while Yemen has been devastated. The list of reversals to peace and democracy is growing: Thailand, Myanmar, Burundi, Congo, and Venezuela, to name a few instances.⁹ This reverse wave is spreading in post-Soviet Europe and even in long-consolidated western democracies.

Systematic disempowerment of the *demos* has accompanied the rise of illiberalism and the retreat of democracy. Regimes often seek to draw a blanket over the past. My academic research on Africa started in the summer of 1968 when I began pulling back a corner of the veil obscuring the anti-colonial movement in Cameroon. This endeavor began with perusing the archives of my Oxford University mentor, Thomas L. Hodgkin, and depositories in France and Cameroon, as well as conducting interviews with former colonial officials. From this initial

⁹ In West Africa, the list of democratic reversals from autocracy is also significant: Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, and Senegal.

research, I demonstrated the deliberate misrepresentation of the independence struggle. The revolt and repression in Anglophone Cameroon today is a direct outcome of French collusion with conservative forces in Cameroon in the 1950s and 1960s to crush the nationalist movement and absorb the English-speaking region.¹⁰ Political repression in Cameroon included the shutting down of access to social media sites in 2017 for several months.



Photo courtesy of Uhuruspirit

After rising steadily in the 1990s, the number of African liberal democracies with full, fair, and open party competition is shrinking. Only Ghana and Senegal on mainland Africa, and the island nations of Cape Verde and Mauritius, merit such a designation today. The 50 other countries in sub-Saharan Africa range from

¹⁰ Ruben Um Nyobé and the 'Kamerun' Rebellion, *African Affairs* (October, 1974); "National Politics in Postwar Cameroun," *Journal of African Studies* (summer, 1975). *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (Oxford University Press, 1977); *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo* (Fourth Dimension Press, Enugu, Nigeria, 1978).

tyrannical, in the case of Eritrea, to at-risk semi-democracies such as Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zambia, with many hybrid regimes possessing autocratic and participatory features in between.

There is a need for deeper reflections and wider consultations on peaceful paths to democracy and democratic paths to peace. Although this lecture concerns Africa, it is also influenced by developments in other regions. With regard to sub-Saharan Africa, there is a unique opportunity for Northwestern University, in partnership with other institutions, to advance immersive learning through access to documents composed before the “post-truth” era. These archives reflect the high level of external involvement in peace and democracy processes in Africa, especially in the late-1980s and 1990s.¹¹ Such work would encourage similar efforts in countries mired today in deep conflicts and repression: Cameroon, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe, to mention prominent cases.

Two overlapping programs are envisioned: *Freedom Gates Project: The Comparative Study of Peace and Democracy in Africa* and a *Governance and Development Learning Network*. An initial outcome of these programs is the publication of the Internet volume, *The Nigerian Crucible*, mentioned earlier. The experience of re-reading and editing these texts has been an immersive one for the author. The same has been true of the audio interviews with the Freedom Gates researchers. I am made to remember what was forgotten and to learn what was not

¹¹ Scholars have referred to the uniqueness of Africa in this regard as “extraversion.” See Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Pierre Englebert and Caryn Peiffer, “Extraversion, vulnerability to donors, and political liberalization in Africa,” *African Affairs* (July 2012).

perceived at the time.¹² The exercise will make it possible to write a second book on Nigeria and pursue a variety of digital and other learning projects.¹³

V

Open Access and Digital Learning: Past & Present

What accounts for my life-long commitment to Open Access to knowledge and the building of democracy through peace, and peace through democracy? The answers to these questions will be taken up in a memorialist *Freedom Work* project. Here are stages in this trajectory:

- My first book *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (1977) was translated into French, making it available to both English and French speakers.¹⁴
- My second book, *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo* (1977), was published in Enugu, in eastern Nigeria. Copies had to be smuggled across the border.¹⁵

¹² The mythical Sankofa bird, of the Akan peoples in Ghana, symbolizes this process of turning around and fetching from the past.

¹³ My first book on Nigeria, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), was published in a Nigerian edition by Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 1991. It was re-issued by Cambridge University Press in 2013. Also published that year was a book based on a 2011 international conference in Lagos: Wale Adebawale and Ebenezer Obadare, *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (Palgrave).

¹⁴ Oxford University Press, 1977; *Le mouvement nationaliste au Cameroun: Les origines sociales de l'UPC, 1946-1958* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1986). A new edition of the English version is in preparation.

¹⁵ Initially banned in Cameroon, one of its covert booksellers was John Fru Ndi, who later contested for the presidency for the Social Democratic Party in highly flawed elections in the 1990s. He remains a leading critic of the Yaoundé government led by Paul Biya for 35 years. Subsequent versions of this book, unauthorized by me, have been re-published with the copy-editing errors I was not able to correct.

- *Africa Demos*: a bulletin of the Carter Center to monitor democratic transitions in Africa, 1990-1995, was widely circulated, including by western diplomats in Africa.¹⁶
- *AfricaPlus*: an internet blog started in 2012 of essays on peace, democracy, and development by frontline scholars has been reposted on many other sites.¹⁷

These publications constitute a small portion of the studies and analyses that will be made widely available in coming years via the *Freedom Gates* and *Freedom Work* projects and a *Governance and Development Learning Network*. I have always devoted attention to enabling African and Africanist scholars to reach wider communities of readers.¹⁸ As the brief accounts from the summer 2017 pilot project demonstrate, the *Freedom Gates Project* can enable Northwestern students and others to understand how political spaces can be widened and the “playing field” leveled so that a fair expression of the popular will can take place. They will perceive how difficult it is to consolidate and protect these gains. Many of the documents to be studied were generated by the actual participants in these exercises. Finally, they can speak in person and via Internet technologies to individuals whose memories will also be revived by this immersive process.

Next Steps

Lecture: *Governance for Structural Transformation*, Addis Ababa, December 4, 2017

¹⁶ https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/catalog?search_field=all_fields&q=africa+demos

¹⁷ <https://africaplus.wordpress.com/>. Approximately 50 entries are available on Arch Library; https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/catalog?locale=en&search_field=all_fields&q=africaplus

¹⁸ The booklet, *African Democratic Perspectives*, 1997, was entirely devoted to the opinion and analyses by African scholars: https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/catalog?locale=en&search_field=all_fields&q=african+democratic+perspective

In a plenary address to a joint conference of the African Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa, December 4, 2017, it is stated that greater access to print and digital resources is essential to promoting growth, security, and democracy.

Books: *The Nigerian Crucible; Peace- and Democracy-Building in Liberia*

Collaborative Research: *Power Politics and Prospects for Electoral Democracy*

Arch Library: *Nigerian Crucible (Parts III-V)*

Digital Learning: *Freedom Gates documents and reports*

Governance and Development Learning Network: *Print and Internet Resources*